

SURINAM**2021, 5 May (M)**

1628a	\$25	Red crackling bolete, <i>Xerocomus chrysenteron</i>	Boletaceae	A
1628b	\$30	Ruby bolete, <i>Xerocomus</i> (now <i>Hortiboetus</i>) <i>rubellus</i>	Boletaceae	A
1628c	\$40	Suede bolete + at least 3 others, <i>Xerocomus subtoentosus</i>	Boletaceae	A
1628d	B [\$51]	Peppery bolete, <i>Boletus</i> (now <i>Chalciporus</i>) <i>piperatus</i>	Boletaceae	A

Printed such that stamps can exist either as singles, as a vertical strip of 4, or as a block of 4. My best guess for this issue is that, consistent with recent issues, these stamps were probably issued in miniature sheets of 8 stamps; 2 columns of 4 x 4 rows of 2 stamps, with 1 column upright while the other is inverted relative to the other.

Look-alikes

Belgium (15 Mar 2021): MS of 5 different Jellyfish (Sc#2943). All have the basic shape of gillless mushrooms.

Caveat Emptor! (part 2) “Legalities”

Paul A. Mistretta

In the last issue I began a discussion of a real problem negatively affecting our shared interest in topical philately. In recent years the “issuing” of illegal “stamps” (declared or not by the powers that be at) has far more than doubled the number of items needed to complete a collection of mushrooms on stamps. (And the problem doesn’t end there!) You could say (but probably shouldn’t) that our topic has mushroomed over the last 10-15 years.

But how does one determine whether the issues being offered for sale are valid postage or just pretty wallpaper?

Let’s begin at the beginning with The Universal Postal Union (the UPU). (Note: to avoid confusion all direct quotes in this article will be typed in a different font than the remainder of the article.)

Self described on its website “The Universal Postal Union is a United Nations specialized agency and the postal sector’s primary forum for international cooperation” (Anon. 2020c). Further:

“Established in 1874, the Universal Postal Union (UPU), with its headquarters in the Swiss capital Berne, is the second oldest international organization worldwide.

“With its 192 member countries, the UPU is the primary forum for cooperation between postal sector players. It helps to ensure a truly universal network of up-to-date products and services.

“In this way, the organization fulfills an advisory, mediating and liaison role, and provides technical assistance where needed. It sets the rules for international mail exchanges and makes recommendations to stimulate growth in mail, parcel and financial services volumes and improve quality of service for customers.” (Anon 2020a)

The Universal Postal Convention Manual, published by the International Bureau of the Universal Postal Union in Berne (Anon. 2019), contains specific language which is slightly changed and renumbered from previous editions of the Manual, but which retains the sense of the original policies of the Union found at least as early as in the 2004 Universal Postal Convention and Final Protocol approved at the UPU Congress held in Bucharest (Anon. 2009). Quoted sections of Article 2 describes the necessary identification of a legitimate postal authority, while the quotes of the full text of Article 6 describes legitimate issues.

Article 2

Designation of the entity or entities responsible for fulfilling the obligations arising from adherence to the Convention

1. Member countries shall notify the International Bureau, within six months of the end of Congress, of the name and address of the governmental body responsible for overseeing postal affairs. Within six months of the end of Congress, member countries shall also provide the International Bureau with the name and address of the operator or operators officially designated to operate postal services and to fulfil the obligations arising from the Acts of the Union on their territory. Between Congresses, member countries shall notify the International Bureau of any changes in the governmental bodies as soon as possible. Any changes with regard to the officially designated operators shall also be notified to the International Bureau as soon as possible, and preferably at least three months prior to the entry into force of the change...

Article 6

Postage stamps

1 The term "postage stamp" shall be protected under the present Convention and shall be reserved exclusively for stamps which comply with the conditions of this article and of the Regulations.

2 Postage stamps:

2.1 shall be issued and put into circulation solely under the authority of the member country or territory, in conformity with the Acts of the Union;

2.2 are a manifestation of sovereignty and constitute proof of prepayment of the postage corresponding to their intrinsic value when affixed to postal items, in conformity with the Acts of the Union;

2.3 must be in circulation, for postal prepayment or for philatelic purposes, in the member country or territory of issue, according to its national legislation;

2.4 must be accessible to all citizens within the member country or territory of issue...

3 Postage stamps comprise:

3.1 the name of the member country or territory of issue, in roman letters, or, if the UPU International Bureau is so requested by the member country or territory of issue, the abbreviation or initials officially representing the member country or territory of issue, in accordance with the conditions laid down in the Regulations;

3.2 the face value, expressed:

3.2.1 in principle, in the official currency of the country or territory of issue, or as a letter or symbol;

3.2.2 through other identifying characteristics.

intergovernmental organizations featuring on postage stamps shall be protected within the meaning of the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property.

5 The subjects and designs of postage stamps shall:

5.1 be in keeping with the spirit of the Preamble to the UPU Constitution and with decisions taken by the Union's bodies;

5.2 be closely linked to the cultural identity of the member country or territory, or contribute to the dissemination of culture or to maintaining peace;

5.3 have, when commemorating leading figures or events not native to the member country or territory, a close bearing on the country or territory in question;

5.4 be devoid of political character or of any topic of an offensive nature in respect of a person or a country;

5.5 be of major significance to the member country or territory.

6 Postal prepayment impressions, franking machine impressions and impressions made by a printing press or another printing or stamping process in accordance with the Acts of the Union may be used only with the authorization of the member country or territory."

So, now we have a clear definition of the legality of both postal agencies and the stamp issues bearing their names. With the definition in-place we can deduce some common characteristics of 'illegals'.

These include:

- The source of an issue bearing the name of a postal authority recognized under Article 2 & Article 6 section 3.2.1 is not actually that postal authority,

- The "issues" are designed primarily for the philatelic trade and not for franking of postal materials (violates Art. 6, Sec. 2.2)

- The issues were never circulated by the postal system of the country to which they are attributed, but are sold directly on the open market either through stamp sales houses or through internet sales (violates Art. 6, Sec. 2.3)

•The issues are not authorized by a member country; although, for some issues “contracts” with persons not authorized to represent the legitimate postal agencies are executed and used to “prove” legitimacy (violates Art. 6, Sec. 6)

In order to help collectors evaluate legality of issues, the UPU through the WADPS (World Association for the Development of Philately) has established the WNS (the WADP Numbering System) which:

“...is a register of all official postage stamps issued by its members created in 2002 by UPU, WADP and its partners. It is the only system that provides collectors with a guarantee that a given stamp is official.” (Anon. 2020d)

You can access the WNS search engine at: <https://www.wnsstamps.post/en/Stamps-Search>. Once there you are ready to search the 100,000 plus listings of valid postage stamps of the 194 UPU member countries which have been issued since 2002.

A couple of hints are in order:

•Neither “mushroom” nor “fungus” typed in the “**Theme**” box (in the search menu at the left) generates any results.

•“**Flora**” did produce results, but generates a massive listing including all sorts of plants (herbaceous and woody), flowers, and mushrooms. Adding the *Sub-theme* of “**Mushrooms**” to your requests gets you the, much shorter, listing desired.

•Clicking the “**Statistics**” button at the top of the page generated a useful listing of the total number of stamps issued, with annual totals, since 2002 for each of the 194 countries listed, however,

•Most useful for my purposes when viewing the data in this manner was clicking on the country names in the listing of statistics (discussed below).

Clicking on any country name in the statistics table generates a screen of eight stamp images with general information about each. Images are displayed in reverse chronological order (most recent first). Clicking the “**More**” button at the bottom of the screen generates the next eight images for the country. As you click the “More” button the images from previous clicks remain above the current info, so that ultimately, simply by scrolling up or down, you have available a complete catalog of legal issues for the country you are researching.



Figure 1. Typical partial initial listing of stamps from the information accessed in the “Statistics” table of the WNS website.

In addition, clicking on any of the images (both here and in the “Mushrooms” listing) generates a fuller description of the item clicked (Figure 2).

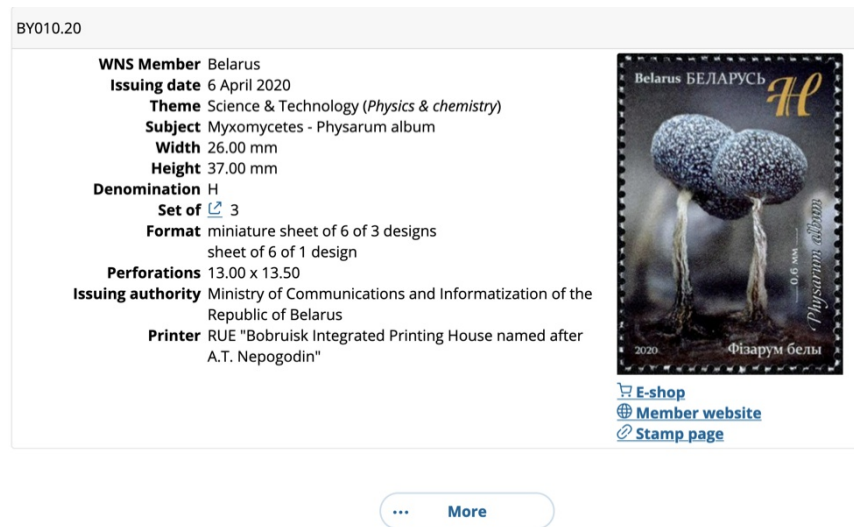


Figure 2 Expanded details of the individual stamp being researched. (Clicking the “More” button returns you to the previous, eight-image, screen.)

There are several things to note in Figures 1, 2 or both as follows:

- WNS Catalog number (an eight-character descriptor for each individual stamp):
 - A 2-letter country code; (the codes are ISO 3166 Alpha-2 country codes),
 - A 3-digit individual catalog number (“serial number”)
 - A “.” separator
 - A 2-digit year (this works as a 2-digit number since all records in the database are for issues from 2002 or more recently, so that 20** is assumed.)
- Date of issue
- Subject of the vignette, and
- Additional data as seen in Fig. 2 above.

Clicking the little arrow by the “Set of” information in the figure 2 type record generates a screen showing all of the images of the stamps included in the set.

Caution must be exercised with respect to the completeness of the data in this database. The data which it contains is based on the voluntary submission of new issue information by the official postal agency of each of the member countries. And therein lies a very real potential problem.

The process of “submission” includes the notification of the other 192 UPU member countries (generally in the form of a circular) and the submission of 15 samples of the issue to the cataloging committee at the UPU for confirmation and subsequent inclusion in the WNS database. (Article 06-002 of the UPU’s Convention Manual; Anon. 2019).

Should a country choose not to follow the protocol, the database will no longer include all valid postal items from that country. Thus, the list is conservative, probably under-listing legitimate issues of stamps.

Note that the reverse, the recording of unauthorized issues, is also voluntary:

“UPU member countries are asked to report any illegal stamp issues to the International Bureau, which will inform the international philatelic community via a circular. Philatelic circulars are freely accessible on the UPU website, as part of the International Bureau’s efforts to raise awareness of this issue among designated operators and WADP partners.” (Anon. 2020b)

I plan on discussing these two and other concerns next time. For now - a little homework. The UPU has posted a brief (14 slide) summary describing illegals of various types at:

<https://www.upu.int/UPU/media/upu/DL.PHIL/LesMenacesContreLaPhilatelieEn.pdf>. This is, I believe, is a presentation outline for a talk given by the Program Manager of the UPU Logistics Directorate. It is easy to read and gives a very good overview of illegals.

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